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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to call attention to certain important aspects of self-concept which have been largely neglected in behavioral science research literature. Self-concept is defined as the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object. Three broad areas of self-concept are discussed. The first area, the extant self-concept, includes the content of the self, the relationship among the parts, the ways of describing the parts and the whole and the boundaries of the object, or the ego-extensions. Previous self-concept research on these structures indicates a general neglect of ordering self-concept traits in hierarchical order. The second aspect of self-concept is the desired self. Meaningful aspects of self-concept largely neglected in research in the area of the desired self include individual acceptance or nonacceptance of a personal characteristic, the dimensions of self-consciousness, self-confidence, and self-values. The third section discusses the social or presenting self. It purports that the tendency of most research is to confuse the presenting self with the extant self-concept. (Author/DB)

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Beyond Self-Esteem: Some Neglected Aspects of the Self-Concept

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My purpose today is to call attention to certain important aspects of the self-concept which have been neglected in the research literature. It may seem strange that I should suggest that we go "beyond self-esteem" when we still face such formidable conceptual and methodological problems in this area. For it cannot be denied that, after 25 years and 2,000 studies, there is still no agreement on what the self-concept is, let alone how to measure it. In discussing the various meanings assigned to the term, "self," Ruth Wylie's assertion "there is no consistent usage among theorists" shines forth as a euphemistic miracle; the less charitable might characterize the terminological situation as a shambles. Furthermore, in two brilliantly reasoned books, she has shown how all available measures fall short.

Yet the chief problem that has afflicted self-concept research, I think, has not been conceptual confusion or methodological inadequacies, serious though these are, but narrowness of vision. In focusing on a single aspect of the self-concept, namely, self-esteem, I think we have failed to appreciate fully the richness, complexity, and explanatory power of this important idea.

This is not meant to suggest, of course, that self-esteem is unimportant -- to admit that I have been fool enough to study something that doesn't count all these years would do my own self-esteem little good. Nor am I unaware of the pressures upon researchers to focus on this aspect of the self-concept. When Roberta Simmons and I were in the early stages of our study of self-concept development among Baltimore school children, I suggested at one point that we drop self-esteem entirely and focus exclusively on other aspects of the self-concept. The horrified shriek that greeted this suggestion still rings in my ears. And needless to say, when we analyzed the self-concepts of black and white children, we ended up focusing chiefly on self-esteem. Nevertheless, though I stand convicted of my own charges, my own sins do not dissuade me from preaching virtue to others.

Since one cannot say what has been neglected without first indicating what is worthy of study, I would like to offer the following definition of the self-concept, namely, that the self-concept is the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object. In James' terms, these are thoughts and feelings about all that is experienced as "me" or "mine." So conceived, the self-concept excludes many ideas with which it is frequently associated: it is not Freud's ego, Sherif and Cantril's ego-involvements, Horney's "real self," Erikson's ego-identity, Tiryakian's existential self, Sanford's "personality," Allport's "proprium," Maslow's "self-actualized personality," or James' "spiritual self" or "pure ego." But it is still a broad idea. When I speak of the self-concept, I have in mind what might more accurately be described as "the realm of self-ideas," as the individual's Selbstanschauung or, better still, his Selbstwissen -- his general guiding self-view or self-knowledge. It is a concept with breadth and depth, one with profound consequences and ramifications both for the individual and society.

The definition of the self-concept as the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object may be sound but it is assuredly unspecific. It is a bit like defining the United States as that area bounded by the Atlantic and Pacific on the East and West and by Canada and Mexico on the North and South, plus Hawaii and Alaska. We may know where it is but this gives us little idea of what is inside. I suggest that the self-concept embraces three broad areas: the extant self; the desired self; and the social or presenting self. I would like to mention a few neglected topics in each area.

Extant Self-Concept

First, the extant self. What does the individual see when he looks at himself? Any reasonably complete description of the extant self-concept must take account of at least four areas. It must consider first, the parts (by which I mean the content of the self); second, the relationship among the parts, (i.e., the structure); third, the ways of describing both parts and whole (dimensions); and finally, the issue of the boundaries of the object (ego-extensions).

Consider the issue of structure. Although writers occasionally speak of the structure of the self or self-concept, it seems to me that few people take the idea of structure seriously. The self-concept consists of a large number of parts, elements, or components, but it is simply not possible to understand it without considering the relationship among the parts. Some investigators implicitly treat the elements of the self-concept like items in a laundry list, like soldiers in a rank, neatly lined up in arbitrary order. To others, the individual's phenomenal field appears to consist of randomly scattered elements, as flotsam and jetsam on the cognitive beach: the components are reflected in such descriptive terms as generous, witty, nephew, Mexican-American, delinquent, eager beaver, etc., all strewn carelessly about the phenomenal field.

Such implicit assumptions do serious violence to the reality of the self-concept. The elements or components of the self-concept bear certain relations to one another, relations which are critical in determining their contribution to the whole. Some elements are central, other peripheral, some congeal into larger wholes (as in types), others are random disconnected bits and pieces. It is not just the parts, but the relationship among the parts, that constitutes the whole.

It must be acknowledged that little is currently known about this structure. One area of self-concept structure in particularly urgent need of attention is the hierarchical ordering of various elements.

It is not unusual in self-concept research to ask subjects to rate themselves on a large number of traits and to add up these responses in order to assess global self-esteem. (The Gough Adjective Check List is probably the best-known of these instruments). The problem with such a procedure is that it overlooks the obvious fact that some characteristics loom large in the individual's system of self-values whereas others are dismissed as trivial. This point was long ago recognized by William James, who said: "...our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be or do. ...I, who for the time have staked my all on being a psychologist, am mortified if others know much more psychology than I. But I am contented to wallow in the grossest ignorance of Greek. My deficiencies there give me no sense of personal humiliation at all." In other words, some dispositions or social identity elements rank high on our hierarchy of values -- stand at the center of our feelings of worth -- whereas others are relegated to the periphery. One person stakes himself on his intelligence but cares little about his savoir faire; for another the reverse is the case. One locates his sense of worth in athletic ability, another in morality, kindness, and generosity. One takes great pride in his social class position, a second in his ethnic background, a third in his race, a fourth in his religious affiliation, etc.

While it is easy to see why self-values are important, it is hard to see why they are almost invariably neglected in research. Some evidence of their importance appeared in a study of adolescents conducted some years back. When these subjects were asked to rate themselves in terms of a series of traits, some rated themselves favorably, others unfavorably. At another point in the questionnaire, these students were asked to indicate, independent of whether they rated themselves favorably or unfavorably, how important each of these characteristics was to them. The relevant point is this: If the subject cared a good deal about his trait, then the relationship between his self-evaluation on the specific trait and his global self-evaluation was much stronger than if he did not care (Rosenberg, 1965: 232).

The point can be highlighted more sharply by the following observation: Assume we take just students who rate themselves as poor on certain traits; in other words, we deal only with those who judge themselves as deficient. In 15 out of 16 comparisons, those to whom the quality was deemed important had lower global self-esteem than those to whom it was not. It is thus not only how the individual assesses a self-concept element but also how much he cares about it, that is, where it is located in his hierarchy of self-values, that counts.

Why is it essential to take account of the hierarchical ordering of elements? Because we are so easily misled if we study self-concept components in isolation. Assume we learn that someone considers himself a mediocre tennis player. In the absence of knowledge of the degree to which the self is invested in this characteristic, we can have little idea what the emotional and behavioral responses to this self-assessment will be. Can we predict that he will spend a good deal of time taking lessons, practicing his service, improving his ground strokes? Can we infer that he suffers feelings of chagrin and self-rage when he double faults? Obviously not, if we have no idea whether he cares an iota about tennis skill. How many investigators ask their respondents how intelligent, good-looking, likeable, moral, neurotic, ambitious, etc. they are without ever bothering to determine how much the respondent cares about these characteristics, where they rank in his hierarchy of values? Such self-values that is, conceptions of the desirable, are not purely idiosyncratic; they are influenced by the individual's location in the social structure -- his class, race, religion, sex, and so on. They should be studied in their own right as well as in conjunction with self-descriptions of various kinds.

If the hierarchial ordering of traits is neglected, the hierarchical ordering of social identity elements, that is, groups, statuses, and social categories, is even more so. This point is characteristically overlooked in the various discussions of self-hatred -- self-hatred among Jews, among blacks, etc.

In implying that attitudes toward one's group will give rise to corresponding attitudes toward oneself, investigators assume that the social identity element is of exclusive importance to the individual. But the self-concept is an extremely complex structure containing a very large number of elements or components, each of which may be invested with pride or shame. In focusing on a particular social identity element, it is easy to overlook the fact that to the black or Jew or Mexican-American there is more to life than being black or Jewish or Mexican-American. A person is not only black but also good-looking or popular; not only Jewish, but also musically talented and athletically adept; not only Mexican-American, but also rich and respected.

The fact that someone belongs to a socially denigrated group, status, or social category does not justify the conclusion that he has low self-esteem; indeed, even the fact that he may agree with the negative attitudes toward his group -- self-hatred in Kurt Lewin's sense - does not necessarily involve low self-esteem. What we must also know is how important this particular group, status, or social category is to his feeling of personal worth, compared to his other traits and statuses. If the group is unimportant, then group self-hatred need not necessarily affect self-esteem.

Perhaps the most vivid expression of the unequal importance of identity elements in the individual's phenomenal field is expressed in the labeling theorist's notion of "role engulfment." In terms of our present conceptualization, this essentially amounts to the following: The elements of social identity -- the categories to which the individual is socially recognized as belonging -- are not equally salient or important to the individual. When the labeling theorist speaks of role engulfment, he means essentially that the deviant social identity achieves overwhelming prominence in the life of the individual.

The fact of being a convict, mental patient, or alcoholic (or, indeed, of being an ex-convict, ex-mental patient, ex-alcoholic) becomes the central aspect of the individual's social and self-identity, the fulcrum about which all else revolves. The fact that he is white, Protestant, handsome, a good father, well-mannered, interesting -- all this is as nothing compared with his hatred of himself as an alcoholic, a homosexual, or an embezzler.

There is, however, no reason to restrict the concept of role engulfment to elements of deviant identity; it can certainly apply to any aspect of social identity. For some people being black may be all important; for others being a good Jew or Catholic may be of highest significance; etc. Social types may also dominate the minds of people. A person may envisage himself as an "intellectual" (not necessarily intelligent) who has a typical set of interests, attitudes, values, possessions, etc. Another may see himself as a "doer" -- a person who cuts through red tape, brushes aside opposition, gets results. For such a person, whether he is a good father, reliable citizen, worthy Christian may be at the periphery of attention. This is not to imply that he does not see himself as a father, citizen, or Christian, but that these elements of his social identity are not as central or critical as other elements.

There are several other aspects of the self-concept which are defined not by their specific elements but in terms of their arrangement or location of the parts. One of these deals with the exteriority or interiority of the self. Each of us, it may reasonably be asserted, has two selves: an overt or revealed self and a covert or concealed self. The overt self represents those aspects of the self which are generally public and visible, such as our physical, demographic, or behavioral characteristics. These might be said to reflect the social exterior of the individual. But parallel with this social exterior is a psychological interior, a private world of thoughts, feelings, and wishes which are either totally or relatively inaccessible to the world outside.

I have found striking differences in older and younger children's tendencies to conceptualize the self in terms of a social exterior or psychological interior and, in fact, there is some evidence of class differences as well. For example, when asked what the person who knows him best deep down inside knows that others do not, the adolescent tends to answer in terms of a psychological interior -- a world of general emotions, attitudes, wishes, secrets -- while the younger child is more likely to respond in terms of a social exterior -- a world of behavior, objective facts, overt achievements, manifested preferences. The younger child's view is turned outward, toward the overt and visible; the older child's gaze is turned inward, toward the private and invisible.

Self-concept development, then, would appear to follow an extremely interesting course -- one which, to our knowledge, has not received previous attention in the literature. As the child grows older, it would appear, he becomes less of a demographer, less of a behaviorist, more a psychological clinician. Expressed in broadest terms, with increasing age the child becomes less of a Skinnerian, more of a Freudian.

Another neglected aspect of the self-concept is the degree to which it is constituted of percepts and the degree to which it is composed of concepts. A number of years ago, Gardner Murphy (1947) advanced the proposition that children's self-concepts follow a characteristic developmental course. In the course of time, he suggested, "The vocabulary of the self becomes, so to speak, less and less visual, and in general less and less sensory. It becomes a language of traits...child psychiatry has empirically confirmed the fact that the appellations which become part of the self work more and more to induce behavior appropriate to them. In short, the self becomes less and less a pure perceptual object, and more and more a conceptual trait system." (505-6)

Although our Baltimore sample does not exactly cover the age range Murphy had in mind, I should say, without going into detail, that they strikingly confirm Murphy's speculations. It is not simply that older and younger children see themselves as different in the ways they actually are -- as bigger or smaller, stronger or weaker -- but the very categories of self-conceptualization differ radically. These categories are even more fundamental than the actual content of the self-concept itself and are, as such, independent of self-esteem.

Time limitations prevent me from disscussing various other aspects of self-concept structure, such as the consistency of the elements, the relationship of the parts to the whole, and the tendencies of elements to hang together or clump in certain ways. Self-concept structure is an area much in need of theory and research. The point is that we can no more understand the self-concept by studying or adding up the parts than we can understand a watch by studying and adding up the gears, cogs, and wheels that constitute it.

Let me turn now to a second neglected aspect of the self-concept, namely, its dimensions. Some years ago I proposed that one way to view the self-concept is as an attitude toward an object. The idea is simple. Every human being can be characterized in terms of a large number of dispositions. Some of these, such as intelligence, optimism, originality, are essentially object-free. But other dispositions -- liking the President, disliking State University, approving of the Soviet Union, admiring movie star X -- are object-bound; they reflect feelings toward something. The self, I suggested, is simply one of the objects toward which one has such feelings. So viewed, self-attitudes constitute part of a broader tradition of attitudes and opinion investigation, enriched by its theory and utilizing its methods of research. Furthermore, attitudes toward any object can be characterized in terms of a general set of dimensions, and these are as applicable to the self as to any other object.

Self-attitudes, like other attitudes, may differ in content, in direction, in intensity, in importance, in salience, in consistency, in stability, and in clarity. Research has overwhelmingly focused on only one of these dimensions, namely direction, i.e., self-esteem, and has almost totally neglected many self-concept dimensions which are comparable in importance.

Take the dimension of self-concept stability. Schwartz and Stryker postulate two seemingly co-equal needs: that "persons seek to create and maintain stable coherent identities [and that] persons prefer to evaluate their identities positively." In other words, people want not only positive self-attitudes but stable ones as well. Without some picture of what he is like -- his traits, statuses, interests -- the individual is virtually immobilized. Insofar as he is an actor in any situation, as Mead has indicated, he must operate on at least some implicit assumption of what kind of person he is and how others see him.

Many writers, using different terminology, have expressed essentially the same view. It is a major aspect of what Erikson terms "identity diffusion" or "identity confusion" (Although Erikson includes not only the current self-picture but also the individual's commitment to a future self). Perhaps the importance of stability and clarity has been expressed most vividly by Lecky: "The self, he said, is the basic axiom of [the individual's] life theory."

Lecky goes so far as to claim that the motive of stability or consistency may even override the self-enhancement drive. Taking the case of an intelligent student who is a poor speller, he argues that in almost every case further tutoring fails, despite the student's ability. The reason is that in the past the individual has incorporated into his self-concept the idea that he is an incompetent speller and resists any change in that view. "Standards need not be admirable, even from the standpoint of the person who maintains them, so long as he believes them to be valid. If he conceives himself as a poor speller the misspelling of a certain proportion of words which he uses becomes for him a moral issue.

He misspells words for the same reason that he refuses to be a thief." Thus, it may not be so much what the individual thinks he is like as whether his self-conception is sure, stable, and definite that affects his sense of well-being. For example, Hammersmith and Weinberg's excellent cross-national study of homosexuals showed that homosexuals who accepted their homosexual status had higher self-esteem, higher stability of self-concept, lower anxiety and lower depression than those not firmly committed to the role. Schwartz, Fearn, and Stryker offered evidence that the same principle applied to the emotionally disturbed. Similarly, how many girls arrange to do poorly in math because they are convinced that, as girls, they just can't do math? Many prefer the stable self-concept of poor mathematician to the ego-enhancing self-concept of good mathematician. Whether stability or self-esteem is generally the more powerful motive is not certain; the only point is that people may prefer a negative identity -- negative even in their own eyes -- to an unstable or uncertain one. An adequate understanding of this self-concept dimension still awaits us.

Even greater neglect has been accorded the dimension of salience. By salience I mean the degree to which the self as an object moves to the top of the mind, to the forefront of attention. In more familiar terminology, this is the demension of self-consciousness. It may be argued, of course, that the self is always in the forefront of consciousness, that it is a condition of communication and of action.

Yet differing degrees of self-consciousness are also matters of immediate experience. If called upon to address a group, we may be keenly conscious of how we look, whether our dress is suitable, or whether our words convey the impression or the personality we wish to project; in such a situation, we are intensely aware of ourselves as objects, for we see ourselves from the standpoints of others.

On other occasions, however, we appear to forget about ourselves -- in a play, in a game, in a task, in listening to music; the self is not in the forefront of attention. Our research has shown that self-consciousness not only varies by age and by sex but is also associated with other symptoms of self-concept disturbance. It is a dimension of considerable importance, despite its neglect.

A third dimension of the self-concept which has recieved insufficient attention is the dimension of self-confidence. The connection between self-confidence and self-esteem is obviously a close one and the two concepts are often used interchangeably. Yet a distinction exists which deserves attention. Self-confidence essentially refers to the anticipation of successfully mastering challenges, obstacles, or tasks or the belief that one can make things happen in accord with inner wishes; it is closely associated with an internal locus of control. Self-esteem, on the other hand, implies self-acceptance, self-respect, feelings of self-worth. A person with high self-esteem is fundamentally satisfied with the type of person he is; he acknowledges his faults while hoping to overcome them.

One reason the distinction between self-confidence and self-esteem is so important is that some people do not <u>stake themselves</u> on competence and mastery. To them being loved, being moral, being self-sacrificing and helpful is their major concern; they may be quite contented to leave the mastery of life's harsh problems to others. On the other hand, there are those abundantly endowed with talent who are confident of their ability to succeed in many tasks but who lack self-respect because they cannot be first in everything, cannot command the love of another, or are overwhelmed by a denigrated social identity element.

At this point let me interrupt this recital of neglected aspects of the self-concept to illustrate how the exclusive focus on self-esteem, and the corresponding neglect of the aforementioned self-concept areas, may produce misleading conclusions.

The example is one of considerable interest today, namely, male and female self-concepts. Many people argue that society treats women as inferior and incompetent, and that women, internalizing these social definitions of their worth, tend to develop feelings of inferiority.

Although these issues are still under debate, and the evidence inconsistent, my impression is that these assertions outstrip the evidence by a wide margin. In their careful coverage of the lieterature in this area, Maccoby and Jacklin report: "The majority of studies have used self-ratings on standardized self-esteem scales. In such studies, sex differences are seldom found; in the studies that do report a difference, it is as often girls as boys who receive higher average scores." If we were to confine our attention to self-esteem, then, we would stop here, for there would be little more to say about sex in relation to self-concept. But what would happen if, instead of restricting our attention to self-esteem, we took account of these other aspects of the self-concept?" In other words, can we learn anything of interest by going "beyond self-esteem?" For example, Florence Rosenberg and Roberta Simmons, comparing boys' and girls' self-concepts by age, uncovered the following interesting finding: that while the self-esteem of boys and girls did not differ greatly, at adolescence girls showed greater instability of self-concept -- their ideas about themselves tended to change more quickly, to vary from day to day. Furthermore, girls showed strikingly higher self-consciousness, expressed in such reactions as feeling nervous about talking in front of others, feeling uneasy if someone watched them work, thinking about other people's reactions to them at public gatherings, etc. These are important and meaningful aspects of the self-concept which, to my knowledge, are largely neglected in research.

Maccoby and Jacklin's careful and extensive summary of research on sex differences points to an equally interesing conclusion: girls apparently do not have lower self-esteem but do appear to have lower self-confidence. Although this fact is sometimes taken as evidence of the damaged self-corcepts of girls, it should be noted that it is not the girls' self-confidence that is unrealistically low but the boys' self-confidence that is unrealistically high In other words, it is not so much that girls under-estimate their abilities as that boys overestimate theirs. Who, then, has the damaged self-concept?

Nor are the self-values of boys and girls the same. In my New York State study of adolescents, I found that, while boys and girls are both highly concerned with being well-liked by others, girls more consistently give this characteristic top priority. They are more likely to stress values of interpersonal harmony and success (such as likeable; easy to get along with; friendly, sociable, and pleasant; well-liked by many different people). Girls are also significantly more likely than boys to stress kindly virtues (kindness and consideration, sympathy and understanding), and aesthetic appreciation (a refined person who shows good taste in things). Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to stress motoric values and physical courage; interpersonal dominance; freedom from naivete; and versatility.

In sum, even if it were the case that male and female self-esteem did not differ greatly, it would still not warrant the conclusion that their self-concepts did not differ. This point has direct relevance to a rather large body of literature dealing with social identity elements other than sex. Among sociologists, a substantial number of studies focus on the relationship of some denigrated social identity element -- a low status racial, religious, or ethnic group, a low social class, a social label or stigmatized status -- to self-esteem.

Without boring you with the details, the upshot of much -- not all -- of this work is to produce a covey of suprised and disenchanted researchers. But if the self-esteem of the privileged and disprivileged differs little, this does not mean that the self-concepts do not differ. As one example, even if disprivileged groups were found to have self-esteem levels equal to those of the more advantaged, and this, incidentally, appears to be true of most so-called "minorities" -- an investigator would still wish to learn whether they might have lesser self-confidence in mastering the problems of the world, given the more forbidding societal obstacles they face.

Let me now turn to several other important aspects of the self-concept which, from the viewpoint of systematic research, have suffered even greater neglect than the foregoing. The first of these deals with the limits or boundaries of the self. Ordinarily, we think of ourselves as bounded by the borders of our skin: there we start and there we end, and ever it shall be. Actually, William James' earliest words on the subject of the self challenged this seemingly self-evident proposition. In speaking of the constituents of the self, he noted that "...it is clear that between what a man calls me and what he simply calls mine the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves. Our fame, our children, the work of our hands, may be as dear to us as our bodies are, and arouse the same feelings and the same acts of reprisal if attacked..."

The extant self-concept thus includes the individual's ego-extensions, for these are experienced as a part of what "we" are. But where to draw the line? Where do we cross the border from self to non-self? One must agree with James that the division is rather vague and nebulous, that the self-boundary is a blurry line, fading away, trailing off. If it be acknowledged that the individual's feeling of self-worth may be vested in objects external to himself, it then becomes an empirical question to determine which objects are incorporated into

which selves, and whether these objects are central or peripheral. One defining characteristic of ego-extensions is that they are invested with pride or shame. A mother may feel pround of her child, a youth proud of his motorcycle, a man proud of his shiny new automobile, an executive proud of his company, an author proud of his book, and so on (or, of course, ashamed of any of these). In fact, one way to tell whether and to what extent an object logically external to the self is experienced as an ego-extension is to observe people's reactions to evaluations of these objects. If, at the conclusion of this presentation, you were to tell me: "That was an asinine talk, but don't take it personally. It's the talk I'm criticizing, not you," I would take cold comfort in your remarks. Similarly, any time a kid in school insults a peer by telling him that "your mother's a blank" or "your father's a blank" or "your sister does such and such," he is expressing clear awareness of an insight which appears to have escaped the notice of most psychologists and sociologists: namely, that the self encompasses objects external to itself.

This topic, incidentally, is not beyond our methodological grasp. In the study of Baltimore school children conducted by Roberta Simmons and me, we asked our respondents: "If someone said something bad about your mother, would you almost feel as if they had said something bad about you?" Almost 89% said they would. When it came to someone saying something bad about your school, the proportion was about 50%; your toys or hobby equipment, 32%; Governor of your state, 24%. Which people center their feelings of personal worth in what objects external to the skin is an almost totally neglected research area. Yet we shall never attain an adequate understanding of the self-concept if we fail to understand the social determinants of its ego-extensions.

In speaking of such objects or elements external to the self, then, we must take account of two issues: one, how one judges or evaluates the element, and two, the degree to which one incorporates it into the self.

If the former is negative, then refusal to incorporate the element may actually protect self-esteem. The principle is not obscure. Take a student attending a Community Junior College who knows that his school has low prestige and, indeed, agrees that this poor reputation is justified; this attitude certainly expresses "group self-hatred" or low pride in group. But assume that his sense of personal worth is totally separated from the school's reputation ("I just go there"); in this case, his self-esteem would be unaffected. In other words, it would be group identification, not disidentification, that would damage self-esteem. As a matter of fact, our Baltimore study afforded some suggestive empirical evidence that this was the case. Let me now turn to another major neglected area of the self-concept which, in lieu of a better term, might be described as the "desired self," consisting of the idealized, committed, and moral images.

In speaking of a desired self, I am referring to what the individual would <u>like</u> to think of himself as. It may be a picture of someone who is always kind, cheerful, and popular; of a perfect housewife and mother; of a creative, inspired genius; of a hard-driving, ruthless, successful businessman; of a person of dominance, power, and control; of a detached, serene, contemplative philosopher; of a person of action, equipped with limitless energy and resources; and so on. Sometimes the image is a cultural stereotype -- a Florence Nightingale, a Napoleon, a knight in shining armor, an Andrew Carnegie, a Schweitzer. Indeed, if we looked carefully, I suspect we would discover a goodly number of Emile Durkheims, Max Webers, or Karl Marxes wandering the halls of the Hilton this very day, though these poor benighted fools might be unwilling to reveal these idealized images to the real Emile Durkheims, Max Webers, or Karl Marxes assembled in this room.

Since the idealized image is an imaginative product, in principle unconstrained by the bounds of reality, one would expect feelings of inadequacy to be universal. The reason they are not, I think, is again suggested by the observations of James. Though using different terms, James too recognized the human propensity to create in imagination of self endowed with all the virtues, shining assets whose beauties the individual could contemplate with pleasure. But, he was quick to add, this type of imaginative product had to be distinguished from another imagined self -- one that one took seriously. He said:

> "With most objects of desire, physical nature restricts our choice to but one of many represented goods, and even so it is here. I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a bon-vivant, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and saint. But the thing is simply impossible. ....Such different characters may conceivably at the outset of life be alike possible to a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must view the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereupon become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real."

These words clearly distinguish two selves: a self to which the individual is seriously committed -- a committed image -- and a fantasy self enjoyable to contemplate -- an idealized image. The distinction is critical. Everyone has dreamed of himself as other than he is, has savored in his mind a pleasing self-picture -- the football hero, the movie star, the brilliant

surgeon, the dazzling political orator, the perfect hostess, the artistic genius, etc. Particularly in youth, when the world is rich with possibilities and the fantasy life is vivid, such Walter Mitty dreams are common. In real life, of course, most people end up driving trucks, tending lathes, selling clothing, caring for children, operating computers, etc. Part of the reason they are not drowned in self-contempt is probably to be found in the fact that they compare their achievements with their committed, not their idealized, images, and do not necessarily fall short.

Both the committed and the idealized images, then, constitute parts of the self-concept, parts of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object. Much of human striving is based on the individual's effort to convert himself into one of the pictures. Both are portrait paintings -- reflecting not reality but visions in the mind of the artist.

Interlaced with the issue of what we <u>wish</u> to be is that of what we feel we <u>should</u> be. For lack of a more satisfactory term, one might call it the "moral image," despite its inexact connotations. Each person composes for himself an implicit book of rules that he must follow, a set of standards he must meet. This process is immanent in the development of the self as object. In the words of Simmel (p. 99): "Morality develops in the individual through a second subject that confronts him in himself. By means of the same split through a second subject that confronts him in himself. By means of the same split through which the eye says to itself 'I am' -- confronting itself, as a knowing subject, with itself as a known object -- it also says to itself 'I ought to.' The relation of two subjects that appears as an imperative is repeated within the individual himself by virtue of the fundamental capacity of our mind to place itself in contrast to itself, and to view and treat itself as if it were somebody else."

In this process we can observe an almost pristine expression of what the existentialists refer to as self-objectification (Tiryakian) -- the individual standing outside himself, viewing himself as an object, passing judgment on what he sees, molding the object into a certain shape, steering it in a certain direction. We are aware of this bifurcation of the self in referring to someone as him "own worst taskmaster" or as a person who "pushes himself" too hard. The imagery of someone "pushing himself" is as curious as it is apropos: the individual driving, shaping, directing the self in accord with what it should be. This concept, incidentally, encompasses a great deal more than the superego.

I think research in this area of the desired self has been extremely limited and, indeed, generally unsatisfactory. Despite the importance and, indeed, fascination of this topic, it remains largely overlooked both by psychologists and sociologists. We still know little about the social determination of the fantasy life.

It may strike you at this point that I am indulging in the academic practice of spinning out gratuitous distinctions, distinctions making little contact with the phenomenal reality of people. That this is not the case is evidenced by the fact that even realtively immature minds grasp these distinctions easily. In our Baltimore study, for example, Roberta Simmons and I asked these school children and adolescents: "How rich do you want to be when you grow up" Very rich, pretty rich, a little rich, or not rich." Among those saying that they wanted to be pretty rich or very rich, we then asked: "Now do you really want to be pretty rich or very rich or is it just a nice idea?" It was apparent from the earnest head-nodding of those who said they really did, or the rather abashed smiles of those who said that it was just a nice idea that even young children clearly recognized the distinction between a playful fantasy, pleasurable to contemplate, and a serious commitment to a desired self. The significance of this distinction for the individual's emotional state as well as for his social behavior seems apparent.

Let me turn, finally, to the question of the social or presenting self, a large topic much discussed but little researched. That we are aware of ourselves as actors in social situations; that the selves we present to others do not necessarily correspond to the selves we believe to be true -- these are sociological dicta. This fact is most evident to us, of course, when the self we attempt to present fails; such failure is evident under conditions of embarrassment, or when we are disconcerted that others see through us or fail to take us at our face value.

The presenting self is the person we seek to appear in the eyes of others. In his mind's eye, the individual develops a picture of how he would like to act, the role he would like to play, in social interaction. This presenting self, it should be noted, is not the same in all situations. As James (294) observed, "Many a youth who is demure enough before his parents and teachers, swears and swaggers like a pirate among his 'tough' young friends. We do not show ourselves to our children as to our club-companions, to our customers as to the laborers we employ, to our own masters and employers as to our intimate friends...it may be a perfectly harmonious division of labor, as where one tender to his children is stern to the soldiers or prisoners under his command." Implicitly, then, we are always engaged in "impression management," as Goffman made clear, governing, guiding and controlling our own actions, acting in accordance with the type of person we wish to appear in the social situation.

Why do people "put on an act" rather than simply "being themselves"? Although some writers attribute this propensity to individual psychopathology, the disposition is more fundamental for it is universal and unceasing. There are several reasons for such behavior. One of the most fundamental is the motive to protect and enhance the self. Since we tend to see ourselves through the eyes of others, we want them to view us as we would view ourselves -- favorably, and as a certain type of person.

From the cocktail-party bon-vivant who attempts to dazzle the assembly with his wit, the adolescent striving mightily to entertain his date, the conspicuous consumer attempting to impress others with his pecuniary strength, to the pathological highjacker or political assassin who is motivated by the desire for public notoriety in the press, the motivation is the same -- to act publicly in such a way as to make a certain impression on the minds of others.

This idea, of course, is not new, different aspects being reflected in James' social self, Linton's social roles, Cooley's looking-glass self, Mead's interaction process, and Goffman's presenting self. Indeed, long before Goffman was taking tea with the Shetland Islanders, Jacob Moreno was actively running psychodrama and sociodrama groups demonstrating in the most vivid possible way our intentional self-presentations in accordance with private ends or in conformity with social norms.

The presenting self, then, originates in the individual's phenomenal field. How we act, wish to act, and attempt to act is essentially under our control. Such a presenting self is inconceivable in the absence of the ability to stand outside oneself and to view oneself as an object, to make decisions about that object, and to carry out those decisions in speech and action. To some extent, every man is his own puppet master. Our musculature submits to the authority of our minds. Our behavior is guided, directed, and controlled by the selves we wish to appear in the eyes of others and, through reflected appraisals, in our own.

Despite the general awareness of the idea, then, it is surprising how little systematic research has been given to questions of how and why the individual attempts to present a certain self to others and how well he believes he has succeeded. Equally important is the extent to to which students of the self-concept, overlooking the distinction between the presenting and extant self, are deceived by appearances, confusing self-deprecatory or obsequious behavior with low feelings of self worth.

For example, in her classic studies of Barnard girls in the late forties, Mirra Komarovsky demonstrated how these girls often acted flighty and scatter-brained with their dates, misspelling words, demonstrating gross flaws in logic, gazing in rapture at the power of their date's intellect and incisiveness of wit. But it is crystal clear from Komarovsky's interviews that these girls did not consider themselves intellectually inferior; on the contrary, they considered themselves smart enough to manipulate their dates as they pleased in order to gain their ends, which, given the value system of the time, was marriage.

Similarly, when Davis, Gardner, and Gardner described how blacks in the Deep South were often obliged to adopt the role of the clown in relation to the dominant white, it was plain that he was doing so on the pragmatic grounds of his own powerlessness and because of the dictates of his own value system -- if you wanted to get something, you had to act that way -- not because he attributed any moral or intellectual superiority to the white. Though publicly humiliated, the black's inward attitude toward the white was one of contempt. So it probably was with the stereotypical fawning Jew in the post-enlightenment period in Europe. One is easily misled if one confuses the presenting self with the extant self-concept.

Time limitations prevent me from mentioning certain other important aspects of the self-concept neglected in systematic research. Furthermore, it is not possible to discuss many of the wide range of <u>social influences</u> on the self-concept which have remained largely unexamined. With all our obeisance to George Herbert Mead and Harry Stack Sullivan, we have actually given relatively little attention to <u>which</u> others actually are significant to people, and why; and with all our deference to Emile Durkheim, we have overwhelmingly ignored the influence of immediate social contexts for self-concept formation. While I have today focused on neglected aspects of the self-concept, a parallel paper on neglected social determinants of the self-concept would not be amiss.

As sociologists, of course, we are interested in understanding how social interaction, culture, and social structure contribute to self-concept formation, and how the self-concept, in turn, influences behavior in various institutional areas. In this area, I suggest, we have erred particularly in our widespread tendency to view the human animal as a lump of clay, a social sponge blotting up the social forces impinging on him and spraying them forth as psychological or behavioral consequences, rather than as an active, selective participant in the entire process. For example, over the past decade we have heard much about the process of labeling. Most such discussions imply that the labeled individual, through the process of reflected appraisals, internalizes the general social definition assigned to him by society. Overlooked in such discussions, however, is the fact that the process of social labeling is accompanied by an active and incessant process of re-labeling designed to strip the label of its pejorative connotations. Morons, subnormals, or mental retardates are re-labelled "exceptional children," lunatics are converted to mental patients, or described as "sick," insane asylums become mental hospitals, deaf become hard of hearing, Negroes become blacks, Indians become native Americans, queers become gays, bastards become illegitimate, and when this term loses its moral neutrality, out-of-wedlock children, or, when this doesn't work, Off's, garbage collectors become sanitary engineers, bookies become turf accountants, and so on. The nouns of social identity are generally as prone to social evaluation as the adjectives, as evidenced by the considerable ingenuity exercised to re-label the abjured categories.

All this is nothing new for, as Thomas Hobbes long ago noted, "...men give different names to one and the same thing, from the difference of their own passions: as they approve a private opinion, call it opinion; but they that mislike it, heresy: and yet heresy signifies no more than private opinion; but has only a greater tincture of choler." 26

The self-concept, viewed as the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object, is thus a subject of scope and importance. In centering our attention so heavily on self-esteem, we have neglected large, almost uncharted areas of this realm; I have mentioned several of these today and would mention more, had I the time. My point, of course, is not to suggest that self-esteem is unimportant, which it is not; indeed, if I were obliged to restrict myself to a single aspect of the self-concept, it would probably be that. Nor do I mean to suggest that we should study other aspects of the self-concept because, like Mount Everest, they are there, but for more specific reasons.

The first is to help resolve certain issues that currently afflict research conclusions. It is not unusual to find researchers reaching conclusions about global self-esteem when their evidence refers to specific elements of the self-concept -- evaluation of such membership groups as race, religion, ethnic groups, assessment of one's academic ability, and so on. Others use the terms self-esteem when they actually have in mind such ideas as self-confidence or the sense of control over one's destiny. Thus, debates are common whether boys and girls, blacks and whites, higher and lower classes differ in these respects. In many cases, I believe, the disputants are really talking past one another because they are referring to different issues. Even if it is shown that the self-esteem of such groups differ little, this does not mean that the self-concepts do not differ. For example, several years ago, two investigators published a volume in the Rose Monograph Series focusing almost exclusively on the self-esteem of black and white school children andyet almost totally ignored numerous other aspects, elements, or dimensions of the self-concepts by which the races might differ. Each investigator has since agreed to blame this oversight on the other. It may be hard for this audience to believe that such conceptual blindness and narrowness of vision still obtain in our field, but I can assure you it is true.

Let me now suggest a second reason for taking account of these neglected aspects of the self-concept, namely, that I think we will never understand self-esteem unless we go beyond self-esteem. Let me be as concrete as possible. What does the fact that someone has a low opinion of his intelligence or neatness or tact or honesty tell us about his self-esteem? Very little, unless we know something of his self-values -- how much he cares about his intelligence, tact, neatness, etc. What does the fact that someone is uncertain of his ability to master certain tasks tell us about his self-esteem? Very little, unless we know the connection between his self-confidence and his self-esteem. What does the fact that someone is a homosexual, mental patient, delinquent or member of another stigmatized social status tell us about his self-esteem? Very little, unless we know whether he has committed himself to that status or continues to struggle against it. What does the fact that certain minority group members absorb the general negative attitudes of the broader society toward their groups tell us about their self-esteem? Very little, unless we know how central or peripheral to the self this particular ego-extension is. What does the fact that someone wishes to be President or Babe Ruth or Albert Einstein tell us about self-esteem? Very little, unless we know whether these are playful fantasies or serious commitments, whether they are, in Piaget's words, pour le vrai ou pour s'amuser. Or what can we tell about the self-esteem of people who are subordinate, inferior, or self-denigrating in relation to those who have the power to satisfy or frustrate their values? Very little, unless we know the extent to which the presenting self corresponds to the extant self.

Although 85 years have elapsed since William James presented to the world his dazzling insights into the self-concept, I sincerely believe that we have scarcely scratched the surface of this complex but fascinating topic. I attribute this result in important part to our disinclination to go "beyond self-esteem," thus leaving large areas of the self-concept unexplored.

I do not mean, of course, that we should fill in gaps just for the sake of filling in gaps, i.e., to satisfy our compulsive needs for intellectual neatness. I am suggesting rather that our understanding of human motives, emotions, cognitive processes, and behavior would be appreciably enhanced by such knowledge. The self-concept is important to everyone, and in a wide variety of ways. Whether a high school student will apply for college will depend not so much on how intelligent he is as on how intelligent he thinks he is. Whether a person will undertake a difficult task will depend not so much on his actual skill or ability in the area as on his assumption regarding his skill or ability. (Whether he will succeed or fail, of course, depends on the actual self more than on the self-image.) Someone who sees himself as refined and aesthetic is likely to devote his leisure hours to the fine or lively arts, to the cultivation of tastes in food, art, music, design and so on. A person who prides himself on being "realistic" may be cynical of political figures, watch his partners like a hawk, search for evil and venality in human transactions. The choice of an occupation, as well as the level of occupational aspiration, is likely to be influenced by the picture that the individual has of himself. And so on into every area of life, into family relationships, political behavior, leisure and recreation activity, and so on. As far as I can judge, there is simply no aspect of social life and activity into which the self-concept does not enter either implicitly or explicitly. But we will never gain a true appreciation of the significance of the self-concept in these areas until we go beyond, indeed far beyond, self-esteem.